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2-20-1984

## Backyard Burning Hearings Scheduled

City Club of Portland (Portland, Or.)

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### Recommended Citation

City Club of Portland (Portland, Or.), "Backyard Burning Hearings Scheduled" (1984). *City Club of Portland*. Paper 379.  
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## BACKYARD BURNING HEARINGS SCHEDULED

Permanent restrictions on open burning of yard debris in the Portland area were approved by the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) in November, as recommended in the City Club's report on "Air Pollution Control Policies in the Portland Airshed." Testimony in support of the restrictions was provided by members of the Subcommittee on Air Quality of the Club's Energy & Environment Standing Committee, as well as by representatives of the medical community, the recycling industry and environmental groups. A series of public hearings is scheduled in February on proposed rules for implementation of the EQC's decision.

As proposed, restrictions would become effective in June, 1984, following the spring burning season. Hardship burning permits would be made available for those unable to dispose of debris by other means, at a cost of \$20 for a seasonal permit or \$30 for a yearly permit. Restrictions would apply to much of the Portland metropolitan area, stretching from Gresham to Beaverton, and from the Columbia River to Oregon City.

Public hearings on the proposed rules have been scheduled as follows:

10 a.m., Wed., Feb. 15, 1984, Multnomah County  
Courthouse, Room 602, 1021 SW Fourth Avenue, Portland

7 p.m., Thurs., Feb. 16, 1984, Gresham City Hall, 1333  
NW Eastman, Gresham

7 p.m., Tues., Feb. 21, 1984, Beaverton Operations  
Center, 9600 SW Allan Blvd., Beaverton

7 p.m., Wed., Feb. 22, 1984, Carpenters Union Hall, 276  
Warner Milne Rd., Oregon City

7 p.m., Tues., Feb. 28, 1984, Multnomah County  
Courthouse, Room 602, 1021 SW Fourth Avenue, Portland.

Among the issues for discussion are: the effective date for enactment of the rules; boundaries of the area where the rules will apply; criteria for issuing hardship permits, along with a fee schedule; and the degree of enforcement which DEQ will undertake. The EQC is expected to take final action on these rules in May.

Although backyard burning contributes only about 1.5% of the overall particulate pollution in the Portland area, it is a source of concern because pollutant concentrations may be much higher in some residential areas on certain days when burning is permitted. The EQC determined that backyard burning does contribute to violations of federal pollution standards. In addition, smoke from backyard burning is viewed as a nuisance by many residents who do not burn, because it reduces visibility, is an irritant, causes soiling and sometimes creates unpleasant odors.

The success of the burning restrictions may be affected by the degree to which convenient and reasonable alternate disposal methods are avail-

able. There are at least five current alternatives in the Portland area:

1. Compost leaves and grass and cut up branches for kindling.
2. Haul to a processing site -- McFarlane's in Clackamas (call 659-4240), Grimm's near Tigard (639-3466), or Woodyard in Alsea (649-2324).
3. Borrow, rent or purchase a clipper.
4. Encourage neighborhood associations to rent drop boxes for annual or semi-annual cleanups.
5. Landfill yard debris along with regular household garbage.

A resolution has been adopted by the Portland City Council to establish a taskforce to study these and other means of yard debris collection and disposal.

One approach to this problem which is being considered is use of the provisions of a mandatory recycling law passed by the 1983 Oregon legislature. The law requires that all residents of cities with populations greater than 4000 be given the opportunity to recycle through regular, once-monthly curbside collection of recyclable materials. How that will occur is currently being worked out through DEQ and affected parties such as local governments, haulers, and commercial recyclers. DEQ is developing proposed rules, including a definition of recyclable materials. If yard debris is classified as a recyclable material, curbside pickup of the debris would become mandatory when the recycling law takes effect on July 1, 1986.

Data gathered by DEQ and Metro indicate that about 35% of all households in the Portland area burn debris. Of a total of 676,000 cubic yards of debris generated each year in the region, only about 19% is burned. Composting takes care of 28% of the debris, 26% is picked up with garbage, and 19% is hauled to landfills by homeowners. DEQ expects a 95% reduction in the amount of debris burned under the proposed rules. It is estimated that the average cost of disposing of yard debris by non-burning methods is \$6 annually per household.

A test project by Metro led to the opening of three private yard debris recycling centers in the Portland area. The centers accept, for a minimal fee, yard debris which is then processed for re-sale as mulch and hog fuel. The centers have the capacity to process all of the debris which is now burned as well as most of the debris which is currently being deposited at landfills. Location of the recycling centers and other information on alternative yard debris disposal methods is available by calling the Metro Recycling Switchboard, 224-5555.

City Club members are encouraged to attend one of the hearings listed above to learn more about the proposed restrictions and to present their views. For more information about the proposed rules or hearings schedule, call DEQ at 229-6488.

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